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Statement submitted by Pragya, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The SDGs have sounded a clarion call for addressing the poor and the vulnerable — men, women and children who tend to get left behind and even deliberately excluded as the world progresses. The disadvantages that underpin these vulnerabilities and exclusion span gender, ethnicity, disability, age, economic-strata and geography. For making the world a better place for all, state and non-state actors for development have to work determinedly to dispel the blinders and the barriers that keep us from recognising and addressing those that are most vulnerable and disadvantaged, exposing the psychologies and politics of such exclusion and extending the necessary finances and institutional support towards inclusion. We give below our suggestions for actions to support our commitments on the SDGs:

1. Be hyper-focussed on the most vulnerable/disadvantaged, unwaveringly committed to ensuring their well-being, and deeply aware that the barriers that keep those farthest behind trapped in social-exclusion and/or poverty are the most obdurate. Acknowledge that the forces that help to maintain inequalities and discrimination could even include the institutions/actors of development and governance.

2. Commission independent studies to clearly identify vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and their deprivation/needs, and an incisive assessment of specific barriers as well as institutions/agents of development that overtly/covertly connive to their perpetuation. Target-setting and programme-design must be closely aligned to the findings.

3. Set micro targets-cum-milestones to ensure the full package of rights-opportunities for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, since a broad brush of development, such as used for the MDGs, would once again leave these groups behind. Disaggregate them by sectors, rights/opportunities, provinces, and groups (socially excluded/discriminated, poorest and resource-starved, disadvantaged by geographic-remoteness, policy-oversight, infrastructural-lacunae, technological divide), to ensure the spotlight is shone on the shadows of development and the desired rate of progress is achieved.

4. Institute measurement systems to reflect accurately the status of vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, and changes in status against the goals, keeping in mind that benefit-flows tend to follow well-worn channels to dominant groups. Match disaggregated targets with disaggregated evidence-generation to track progress at micro-scale, ensuring data-integration into national reviews without loss of granularity. Commission periodic, objective studies by independent agencies committed to vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, using the findings for course-correction.

5. Deliver specific right/opportunity-focused programs to address vulnerable/disadvantaged groups: leverage 'Levellers' (technology/education) that tend to reduce the divides, and intervene in 'Empowering' sectors (livelihoods/health) that deliver multiplier impacts; develop niche-industries in remote areas which would contribute to economic-inclusion and neutralise the one-way extraction of resources currently prevalent.

6. Reform state-infrastructure/institutions to ensure equity in their services/facilities and inclusion of vulnerable/disadvantaged groups. Deliver a

social-change/behaviour-modification programme and vigilance-mechanisms to ensure minimum standards and zero-tolerance on discrimination. Ensure strict laws and their implementation, and social protection for vulnerable/disadvantaged groups; at the same time, treat perpetrators of discrimination as deserving both legal and psychological intervention.

7. Create targeted policies with sufficient budgetary allocations for last-mile communities, and incorporate positive discrimination and special allocations towards vulnerable/disadvantaged groups in common programs, in order to bridge the gaps. Propel their civic/democratic participation which would also have the effect of bringing them in from the cold, both politically and developmentally.